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ABSTRACT

In order to support an argument for the teaching of grammar in a writing class, this report first summarizes the descriptive studies done by Kellogg Hunt in 1965 and 1970, and the comparative studies done by John Mellon and Frank O'Hare in 1969 and 1973. The second part of the report consists of five workshop handouts about the following topics: (1) prepositional phrases, compounding, and ellipsis; (2) the four variations of the basic sentence pattern; (3) subordinate clauses; (4) gerunds and gerundives; and (5) appositives. Also presented in the second part is a sequential studies done by John Mellon and Frank O'Hare in 1969 and 1973. The second part of the report consists of five curriculum for grades 3 through 12 outlining the skills and concepts to be learned at each stage of a child's development. The final section of the paper reports on a study, the results of which indicated a connection between knowledge of grammar and students' ability to write when the method used to teach grammar is geared to improving writing skills. The report concludes that results of pretests and posttests involving revising a passage of writing support the assertion that the method used to teach grammar can affect students' ability to write. (SRT)

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A New Method and Curriculum for Teaching Writing and Grammar

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The Tenth National Conference
of
The Society of Educators and Scholars

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Edward Williams College
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Preface for ERIC

My presentation at the Tenth National Conference of the Society of Educators and Scholars consisted of:

1) the reading of a paper on Kellogg Hunt (3),
2) a workshop on a new method and curriculum for teaching writing and grammar (14), and
3) the distribution of copies of a summary of research I have done (26).

I have included all three documents here. (The numbers in parentheses refer to pages in this document.)

The workshop papers without the workshop may be somewhat cryptic, but a reader with a little patience who is willing to provide what literary critics term "the willing suspension of disbelief" should find them rewarding. The workshop format is particularly helpful in demonstrating this approach, since, without it, many readers will tend to see no difference between the approach presented here and traditional approaches to teaching grammar. One reader, for example, dismissed the whole approach as nothing more than a variant of sentence diagramming.

This approach, however, differs significantly: in order to diagram a sentence, a student must find the subject and verb **first**. This is precisely what many students cannot do. Indeed, many of their errors in subject/verb agreement result from their confusing the object of a preposition with the subject of a verb. In this approach, students are taught first to locate and set off in parentheses all prepositional phrases. Approximately one-third of the words in the average sentence are part of simple prepositional phrases, and, with these words set off (and thus out of consideration), students find it easier to locate subjects and verbs. This approach, moreover, teaches students to analyze sentences in context, preferably in their own writing.

Research on Writing and Grammar--Revisiting Kellogg Hunt

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and enemies, thank you for coming. I say "friends and enemies" with reason. Standing here, I am tempted to ask all of you who are in favor of teaching grammar to move to the right side of tha room; all of you who oppose it, to the left. The profession is clearly split on this issue, and unfortunately, neither side seems willing to listen to the other. Your presence here indicates that you are willing to listen, and I am grateful. Since what I am about to say can be offensive to both sides of the argument, and since this is the end of the harvest season, I do hope that you have not brought the remnants of your tomato crop.

The argument against the teaching of grammar is basically statistical. Some people reject statistical arguments out of hand, but I wish to suggest that the argument is basically valid. The problem is that the wrong conclusions have been drawn from it. Statistical studies were made before Kellogg Hunt, but his is the most important work in the field, and it is his work that I wish to concentrate on during the next few minutes. To my knowledge--there is one work by Hunt that I have not yet been able to get my hands on--Hunt never conducted a study that led to the conclusion that grammar is not worth studying (or teaching).

HUNT'S 1965 STUDY

Hunt's studies were **descriptive**, not **comparative**. He was primarily concerned with **finding** a yardstick, a rule for measuring, the syntactic

maturity of the writing of children at different age levels. His most famous contribution is the concept of the "T-unit," or "minimum terminable unit." Before Hunt some researchers had studied the proportion of nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. in the writing of children of different ages. They found no difference. Many researchers had worked with the sentence," but the "sentence" turned out to be a questionable unit. Is a sentence everything between a capital letter and a period or question mark? We all know that third and fourth graders are not the best capitalizers and punctuators.

But even with capitals and punctuation supplied by the researcher, the "sentence" is still unsatisfactory. Young children overcoordinate, usually with "and." As a result, the six-year-old might write, "We went to the store, and then we played football, and then we had supper," which is a fifteen-word sentence. The eight-year-old is more likely to break this into two separate sentences, which would give him an average of 7> words per sentence. Words per sentence, therefore, simply does not work as a measure of maturity.

Hunt solved the problem with his Minimum Terminable Unit, or T-Unit. A T-unit is a main clause plus all the subordinate clauses attached to it or embedded in it. His first, and most well-known study was published in 1965. Having collected a thousand words of free writing from eighteen 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students, Hunt demonstrated that the number of words per T-unit increases significantly at each grade level. The validity of the T-unit as the basic unit of measurement has not only been confirmed by numerous subsequent studies, but it also fits the basic concepts of language processing developed by psycholinguists.

In addition to the T-unit, Hunt explored other indices for measuring

maturity and concluded that words/clause and kinds of clauses (noun, adjective, adverb) per main clause could also be used to judge the maturity of a piece of writing. We must remember, however, that Hunt was looking for statistically verifiable measures. Thus he looked at gerunds and noted, "No other structure increases so dramatically from grade to grade." (1965,110) Likewise, of appositives and verbals used as adverbs, he observes that they "increase very substantially with successively older grades. . . However, they are too infrequent to have a major effect on clause length." (1965,112). The relative infrequency of these constructions also made them poor candidates for statistical analysis. He agrees with earlier researchers, however, that verbals and appositives result from some sort of reduction or consolidation of subordinate clauses. For example, an eighth grade student might write, "When she read the book, she acted the parts of the characters," whereas in tenth grade, the same idea might come out as "Reading the book, she acted the parts of the characters."

In his section on "Implications for the Curriculum," Hunt writes:

> This study provides no justification for teaching some structures early and others late. Indeed it provides no justification for not going straight through a description of grammatical structures once such a course is begun. (1965, 155)

But in his "Implications for Further Research," he observes that:

> The present study does imply that the mature writer produced shorter T-units when he was in the fourth grade. It implies that he learned to consolidate while he was growing up, not necessarily during the process of revising a single piece. This process of expansion of T-units by the addition of more

nonclausal structures appears to be a characteristic which a psychological model for language development will need to incorporate. (1965, 154)

In 1965, in other words, Hunt was not opposed to teaching grammar, and, although his study suggested a definite developmental seqence for syntactic structures, he did not view his work as a complete psychological model.

THE COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MELLON AND O'HARE

I wish to leave Hunt's work temporarily to look at the comparative studies made by John Mellon and Frank O'Hare, two studies frequently named by those who claim that "research has shown that instruction in grammar does not improve a student's ability to write." In passing, we might note that Hunt's study invalidated all the earlier research that made this claim--in effect, he showed that the tools they had used were unreliable. Mellon and O'Hare, on the other hand, based their work on Hunt's T-unit. Unfortunately, the works of Mellon and O'Hare are rarely read. English teachers are not known for their love of statistics, and, to add to the difficulty, both researchers used transformational grammar, a grammar whose concepts and terms are Greek to most English teachers.

As always, our profession was under pressure to show demonstrable results from our teaching, and both Mellon and O'Hare believed that they could used Hunt's valid "T-unit" to demonstrate the effectiveness of a new approach to teaching. In 1969 Mellon published Transformational Sentence-Combining: A Method for Enhancing the Development of Syntactic Fluency in English Composition. His method was to introduce a construction, for example, the subordinate clause, and then to have students do a series of

combining exercises in which they would be given two or more main clauses and be directed to combine them. One of Mellon's examples is the

Infinitive Phrase:

A. SOMETHING would be almost unbearable.

The Rocket fails in its final stage. (T:Infin)

B. For the rocket to fail in its final stage would be almost unbearable. (95)

His study involved three groups of students: a placebo group did no grammar; the experimental group did sentence combining, and the control group used Warriner's traditional grammar. The hypotheses of Mellon's study were very complex, and I urge you to read it since I cannot do it justice here. Suffice it to say that the experimental group, at the end of the study, wrote syntactically more complicated sentences. But Mellon notes something that few people have noticed in his report. When a sub-sample of the students were rated for ideas, organization, style, sentence structure and vocabulary, "The writing of the experimental group was inferior to that of the subjects who had studied conventional grammar, but indistinguishable from that of subjects who had studied no grammar but had received extra instruction in composition--curious results indeed." (69) Indeed curious, **the students who studied grammar wrote better than those who did sentence-combining and better than those who had more instruction in writing!** The people who cite this study as proof against the teaching of grammar ought to read it! To his credit, Mellon himself states that he does not "look upon this study as an attempt to rule on the question whether grammar should or should not be taught in the schools." (1)

The most powerful and influential of the studies against the teaching of grammar is not Mellon's but Frank O'Hare's. O'Hare theorized that the

gains in sentence-complexity in Mellon's study resulted not from the instruction in grammar, but from the sentence-combining exercises alone. He therefore conducted an experiment with seventh grade students, the results of which are reported in his Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction. It is interesting to note that Hunt's "syntactic maturity" is here associated with "improvement." In his 1965 report, Hunt had scrupulously avoided such an implication:

> In this study the word "maturity" is intended to designate nothing more than "the observed characteristics of writers in an older grade." It has nothing to do with whether older students write "better" in any general stylistic sense. (5)

Statistically, O'Hare's results are most impressive, the experimental group having demonstrated an amazingly significant degree of "improvement." The experimental group increased words/T-unit by 64%, with a t-value of 15.68, whereas the contol group had only a 3% increase which was not statistically significant. As in Mellon's study, O'Hare also included a wholistic evaluation of the writing, and his results, contrary to those of Mellon, indicate that the experimental group, the group that did sentence combining and learned no grammatical terms, did better.

I have numerous questions about the "wholistic" evaluation conducted by O'Hare, but here I must concentrate on the question of sentence complexity. O'Hare measured only six factors: words/T-unit, clauses/T-unit, words/clause, nouns clauses/100 T-units, adverb clauses/100 T-units, and adjective clauses/100 T-units. His conclusion--that he has "improved" the experimental students' writing--is based on a single assumption--that more words and more clauses per T-unit means better writing. I doubt that anyone in this room who has taught writing to students at the seventh grade level

or beyond will agree with this assumption. O'Hare was, moreover, aware of a study by Hunt--he lists it in his "References"--that undercuts, if it does not destroy, his premise. Before we turn to that study, we should note one more thing about both Mellon's and O'Hare's studies.

Neither study included any examination or consideration of students' errors. Mellon notes that such a study would be desireable, but he didn't do it. (72) O'Hare, however, eliminated most errors from the papers before they were evaluated. He states:

> This study was interested in the students' writing ability and not at all in their spelling, punctuation, or handwriting talents. In order to eliminate the possible effects of these extraneous factors on the evaluator's judgments, the thirty pairs of compositions were typewritten so that spelling and punctuation could be corrected." (51)

What this means is that run-ons, comma-splices, and fragments resulting from unattached subordinate clauses and participles--many of the things that teachers work so hard to eliminate from their students' writing--were simply erased by the experimenter. Then we are told that the students' writing has been "improved"! Now I have analyzed a few hundred passages, and I don't find run-ons, comma-splices and fragments difficult to identify or count. O'Hare's rationale for eliminating them seems quite obvious: he read Hunt's 1965 comments about further research. Hunt states, "As more nonclausal structures are packed into a clause the likelihood of stylistic faults occurring increases apace. The greater the congestion the greater the hazard." (152) One can't very well count all those stylistic faults and then conclude that the writing has improved.

[Note: After this paper was delivered, O'Hare published The Modern Writer's Handbook (Macmillan, 1986), the first half of which is devoted to very traditional grammar. Apparently he considers his own study invalid.]

HUNT'S 1970 STUDY

The study which O'Hare ignored was published by Hunt in 1970. Once again it was a descriptive, not a comparative study, and it had several aims. For one thing, the studies done previously were all based on students' free writing. Hunt felt that such studies included extra, uncontrollable variables, primarily the students' imagination--the student who had more to say was likely to write longer sentences, but there was no way to measure imagination in free-writing. Thus Hunt used the "Aluminum" passage, a paragraph of 32 extremely short sentences which students were asked to revise. In addition to eliminating imagination as a variable, the aluminum passage also allows the researcher to measure another important characteristic of good writing--its concision. In essence, asked to say the same thing, the better writer should use fewer words.

But Hunt was also interested in something else. Taken together, the various research reports were beginning to indicate that the use of subordinate clauses occurs naturally and automatically in students' writing, with the biggest natural increase occuring in, what else, the seventh grade--the grade chosen for study by both Mellon and O'Hare. From 8th grade on, the rate of increase in subordinate clauses decreases significantly, but the number of words per clause continues to increase. Hunt theorized, and his results demonstrated, that "the great majority of

the syntactic changes that increase with maturity are those that reduce a clause to less than a clause." (43) It is no wonder that O'Hare ignored Hunt's study. Unfortunately, Hunt's study was not published by NCTE, and it has been ignored by almost everyone. (His use of transformational terminology in the study did not help its reception.)

Near the end of the study, Hunt writes: "It seems advisable that a seqential curriculum on syntactic maturity covering many grades, perhaps all, should be undertaken" (60). Because of his use of transformational concepts and the way in which he arranges data (in categories such as "miscellaneous"), I cannot state that Hunt's study specifically supports the curriculum I will be suggesting here, but I can state that it supports its general outline. The data indicate that clauses increase significantly in seventh grade, gerundives in tenth, and appositives still later. In essense, Hunt set us well on the way toward creating a truly developmental--in the Piagetian sense--concept of syntactic maturity. His suggestion for a sequential curriculum implies that we should teach a construction near the time when it is naturally developing in our students.

In concluding this all too brief survey, I would like to note that although Hunt does not seem to be aware of the ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky, his idea of a sequential curriculum is supported by their research, particulary by what Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development." (Mind in Society, 85-91) We can visualize the zone of proximal development as the area between two concentric, expanding circles, the inner circle representing mastered concepts. In math, for example, a child must not only be able to add, but must also feel comfortable with addition, before multiplication becomes part of the zone of proximal development. When the child has mastered multiplication, geometry becomes

part of the zone. Vygotsky's argument is that it makes no sense to try to teach a student something that is not in the zone. If the subject being taught is in the inner circle, the child will be bored. If it is beyond the zone, the child simply will not be able to comprehend it.

What Hunt has shown us is that in sixth and seventh grades, subordinate clauses are within the zone of proximal development. The student, moreover, must become comfortable with subordinate clauses before s/he can begin to master the use of reduced clauses such as gerundives or appositives. The curriculum, in other words, must be spread out over several years to give the student time to master each construction. Attempting to teach a construction too early will simply result in frustration for both student and teacher. Kellogg Hunt deserves much more attention than he has receive, and I hope I have encouraged you to visit him on your own.

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WORKSHOP PAPERS

Introduction

The following pages consist primarily of five handouts that I use with college Freshmen. (Some exercises have been deleted.) Participants will use the handouts, in sequence, to gain a feel for the approach being suggested. The handouts are followed by some suggestions for developing a syntactic curriculum for grades 3-12.

The method here proposed includes the following assumptions:

1.) that children develop mastery of all essential syntactic constructions naturally and without instruction, but that they may need instruction in how these constructions can be combined.

2.) that more constructions are attached to each main clause in writing than in speech.

3.) that a conscious understanding of how every word in a sentence is related to the basic S/V pattern will improve students' writing, both reducing syntactic errors and enhancing sentence flexibility.

4.) that the method will be used **cumulatively**, i.e., when students move to the study of subjects and verbs, they will continue to analyze the prepositions in their sentences. Each step in the process thus includes all preceding steps, thereby providing automatic review.

5.) that the method will be integrated as much as possible with the students' own writing as well as with their reading across the curriculum.

A summary of a research study that demonstrates the effectiveness of this method follows these workshop papers.

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HANDOUT # 1: PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES, COMPOUNDING AND ELLIPSIS

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions function to join a noun or pronoun to the rest of the sentence; therefore, IF THE NOUN OR PRONOUN IS THE SUBJECT OF A VERB, IT CANNOT BE THE OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION:

1.) Mark arrived (after supper).
2.) Mark arrived [after supper was finished].

If you said sentence number one, and someone who didn't hear you asked, "After what?", you would answer "after supper." In sentence two, on the other hand, the same question elicits the response--"after supper was finished." Since the verb "was finished" has to go with "supper," "after" here functions as a subordinate conjunction introducing a clause, and not as a preposition. (We will examine clauses later.)

Although they add meaningful details to sentences, prepositional phrases clutter up sentence structure. For example:

(On his way) (to work) (in Washington) a man (in a red car) (with pink stripes and purple polka dots) hit (from behind) a woman (in the middle) (of the street).

Once the prepositional phrases have been set off, we are left with "a man hit a woman." Setting off prepositional phrases with parentheses, in other words, reduces the complexity of the sentence.

The following words are frequently used as prepositions:

about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, as, at, before, behind, beneath, beside, between, beyond, by, despite, during, except, for, from, in, inside, into, like, near, of, off, on, onto, outside, over, since, through, to, toward, under, until, up, upon, with, within, without, aside from, as to, because of, instead of, out of, regardless of

"To" plus a noun or pronoun is a prepositional phrase. "To" plus a verb is an infinitive. We will study infinitives later: for now, just remember not to place them in parentheses.

COMPOUNDING

Compounding is the joining of identical parts of speech or constructions through the use of coordinate conjunctions. Any part of speech and any construction can be compounded.

ELLIPSIS

Ellipsis is the omission of words that are logically understood:

"Come here" means "*You* come here."
"He is taller than she." means "He is taller than she *is tall*."

Frequently, the object of a preposition is ellipsed: The ship went (under *the water*).

EXERCISES

1. Write a 50 word description of your room. Be sure that it has a thesis or point to it. If it does not include 22 prepositional phrases, rewrite it, adding phrases until there are 22. Place parentheses around each phrase, and number them. (Your final version will be much longer than 50 words.)

2. Directions: In the following short essay, entire prepositional phrases and some adjective and adverbs have been replaced by blanks. First read through the essay to get a general sense of its meaning and tone. Then copy the passage, replacing each blank with a word that makes sense. Don't worry about the indicated part of speech. Remember that you are not expected to guess the author's words, but you should try to choose words that add to the meaning of the passage.

If Man has benefitted _adv_ (_P_ his __N__) (_P_ the dog), what, you may ask, has the dog got (_P_ _P_ __N__)? His scroll has, (_P_ __N__), been charged (_P_ __N__): he has known the muzzle, the leash, and the tether; he

has suffered the indignities (_P_ the _adj_ _N_, the _adj_ _N_ (_P_ the _N_), the _N_ (_P_ the _N_)); his love life (_P_ the _adj_ _N_) (_P_ his _N_) has been regulated (_P_ the _adj_ _N_) (_P_ _N_), his digestion ruined (_P_ the _adj_ and _N_) (_P_ _adj_ _N_). The list (_P_ his _N_) could be continued _adv_. But he has _adv_ had his fun, for he has been privileged to live with and study (_P_ _adj_ _N_) the only creature (_P_ _N_), the _adv_ unreasonable (_P_ _N_).

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HANDOUT # 2: THE FOUR VARIATIONS OF THE BASIC SENTENCE PATTERN

Finite Verbs and Verbals

The distinction between finite verbs and verbals is purely one of function. Finite verbs are the verbs that fill the "V" slot in sentence patterns; verbals are verb forms used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs:

a.) He was planting a garden.
b.) Planting a garden is hard work.
c.) Planting the garden, he hurt his back.

"Planting" appears in each of these sentences. In (a) it is part of the finite verb; in (b) it functions as a noun, the subject of the sentence; in (c), as an adjective, modifying "he." Constructions like (b) and (c) will be studied later. For now, the important thing is to be able to recognize when a verb functions as a finite verb.

To make this distinction, first rely on your own unconscious knowledge of English. (Remember that in order for you to be able to speak English, your mind has to make these distinctions all the time; right now, you are simply trying to make this unconscious skill conscious.) If you had been asked to identify the subjects and verbs in (a), (b) and (c), you would probably have done so correctly. If you are in doubt about whether or not a verb or verb phrase is finite, try to use it in a short sentence of your own. For example, in the sentence

Reading the novel, he fell asleep.

"fell" is a finite verb--"He fell asleep." "He reading the novel," however, sounds ungrammatical. To make it a sentence, you would have to add to the verb: "He **is/was** reading the novel." This means that "reading" is here a verbal. Even with the sentence test, you may still make occasional mistakes. Don't worry about them. The distinction between finite verbs and verbals will be clearer after we study verbals.

DISTINGUISHING THE FOUR VARIATIONS OF THE BASIC PATTERN

The key to distinguishing the four variations is to form a question by placing "whom or what" **AFTER** the verb. The answer to that question will indicate the pattern.

Pattern One: Subject/Verb

In many sentences, the question "/Verb/ whom or what?" does not have an answer: "The birds sing."

Note that in looking for sentence patterns the only question we are interested in is "/Verb/ whom or what?" In general, we might be interested in knowing "**How** do the birds sing?" or "**Why** do the birds sing?" or "**When** do the birds sing?" But these questions will not give us a complement. When nothing answers the question "/Verb/ whom or what?" we have an S/V pattern.

Pattern Two: Subject/Verb/Predicate Adjective

Very simply, if the word that answers the question "/Verb/ whom or what?" is an adjective, then that complement is a predicate adjective:

The book is heavy.

Pattern Three: Subject/Verb/Predicate Noun

Pattern three differs from the others not only in form, but also in purpose: it is the way we indicate equivalence, identity, or, in a sense, equals. If the answer to the question "/verb/ whom or what?" is a noun and the verb indicates that that word equals or resembles the subject, then the complement is a predicate noun:

The car is a piece of junk.

Although the verb "to be" ("is," "are," "was," "were,") is the most frequently used in this pattern, other verbs often appear in it. There is no need to remember a list of these words: all one has to remember is that the pattern indicates an identity or equivalence. Note, for example:

Ed remained a child. ("Remained" here means "was" and "continues to be.")

Bill became a teacher. (He "was" not, but now he "is.")

A sentence such as "Sleeping children resemble angels." implies that when they are sleeping, children are angels, at least in appearance. "Angels," therefore, is a predicate noun.

Pattern Four: Subject/Verb/(Indirect) Direct Object

Any word that answers the "/verb/ whom or what?" question and is not a predicate adjective or predicate noun has to be an indirect or direct object: "The cat hurt its leg." "The cat hurt it." "The baby ate the spoon."

Indirect objects are in parentheses in the pattern because they may or may not appear in a sentence. **AN INDIRECT OBJECT IS A PERSON OR GROUP TO OR FOR WHOM SOMETHING IS DONE:**

He gave **me** a ball.

She gave **Jeffrey** a present.

We bought the **cat** some food.

Clearly, he did not "give me," she did not "give Jeffrey," nor did we "buy the cat." Frequently, the indirect object is expressed in a prepositional phrase with "to" or "for":

The cat killed a mouse **for us.**

Note that a direct object can be identical to the subject:

They saw themselves in the mirror.

The difference in complement is based on the difference in the meaning of the verb. In these sentences, the verb does not imply any equality between the subject and complement, that equality is purely a matter of the meaning

of the nouns. Words ending in "-self" ("-selves") are often direct objects even though they refer to the same thing as the subject.

Exercise Main Ideas in the Main Pattern

Directions: Big words and lots of them do not create a good style. Rather, a good style results from choosing accurate words and eliminating words that do not add to your meaning. One of the best things you can do to improve your style is to watch the words in the subject/verb/complement slots of your sentences. As a general rule, the most important ideas should occupy these slots. A student, for example, wrote:

> Milanov's interview with Opera News possesses many indications of her frankness and determination.

Notice that "frankness and determination" are here relegated to the subordinate position of a prepositional phrase and that the verb "possesses" is not necessary. The student has a better potential verb in the sentence:

> Milanov's interview with Opera News indicates her frankness and determination.

Since the subject/verb/complement slots are the center of the syntactic pattern, it is simply a matter of common sense to use these slots for your central ideas.

Remember that you should not worry about subject/verb position or any other aspect of grammar while you are writing your draft. Get your ideas on paper first and then consider the syntax in the process of revising.

Rewrite the following sentences, putting the main ideas in the main slots.

1. The tourist trade, especially during the summer, is beneficial because of the employment opportunities offered to many young people.

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HANDOUT # 3: SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

A **clause** is a subject/verb/complement pattern and all the words that modify it. There is, in other words, one clause for every subject/verb pattern. You have already seen that many sentences contain more than one clause. Now you must learn to distinguish **main** from **subordinate** clauses. **Subordinate clauses** function as **nouns, adjectives, or adverbs** in relation to another clause. **A main clause** has no such function. Every sentence should contain at least one main clause.

Frequently subordinate clauses can be recognized as such because they are introduced by subordinate conjunctions:

after, although, as, because, before, if, since, when, where, while, that, what, who, how, why, which, whenever, wherever, whatever, whoever, whichever, whether

The function of a clause depends on how it is used in a sentence, NOT on the conjunction that introduces it.

FUNCTIONS OF SUBORDINATE CLAUSES (The descriptions of noun, adjective and adverbial clauses have been deleted.)

The easiest way to identify an adverbial clause is through the process of elimination. If a clause is not main, noun, or adjectival, it is almost always adverbial. Adverbial clauses function just as adverbs do: they modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

THE MECHANICS OF ANALYZING CLAUSES

The examples thus far have been very simple. Your objective, however, is to be able to find and understand the function of every clause in what you write (and read). In your own writing you will find numerous clauses within clauses. For example:

I can remember [how happy I became [when Mom told me [that we were going (on a picnic) or (to the mountains.)]]]

The easiest way to analyze such sentences is to start with the last clause and work backward. Thus: "that we were going on a picnic or to the mountains" answers the question "What?" after "told" and is its direct object. "When . . . mountains." tells **when** the writer "became" happy and thus acts as an adverb to "became." "How happy . . . mountains" answers the question "What?" after "remember," and is therefore its direct object. "I can remember [noun clause]" is the main clause.

If a sentence has more than one main clause, it may be helpful to separate them with a heavy vertical line. Whatever is to the left of the line belongs to one main clause; everything to the right, to the other.

COMMENTS ON STYLE

As a general rule, the main idea should be in the main subject/verb pattern. If you write "I think [drinking can be dangerous]", you reduce your idea to the subordinate clause and put yourself in the main one, thereby shifting the reader's attention to you and away from the idea.

If your sentences seem too short, try combining several sentences into one by making one a main clause, the others subordinate. If your sentences are too long and complicated, cut them into shorter ones.

Consider the possibilities for moving the subordinate clauses. What effects will such changes have on the effect of the sentence?

He knew that biological warefare was unthinkable.
That biological warefare was unthinkable he knew.

COMMON ERRORS

If you understand how subordinate clauses function, you can understand and avoid the most common syntactic errors: (The description of fragments, comma-splices, and run-ons has been deleted.)

1. Revise the following paragraph, making as many of the clauses as possible subordinate. Bracket the subordinate clauses.

But you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim. You have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters. You see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society. You suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering, and you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter. She can't go to the public amusement park. It has just been advertised on the television. You see tears welling up in her eyes. She is told that Funtown is closed to colored children. You see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky. You see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people. You have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" You take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile. No motel will accept you. You are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored." Your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs." You are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next. You are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments. You are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness."--Do you understand why we find it difficult to wait?

[The preceding sentences are expanded from a single sentence in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." After students have made their own combinations, I show them King's original.]

2. Recipe Rosters. Directions: Write sentences that include the following constructions.

1. Pattern: S/V; S/V/IO DO: 1 prepositional phrase as an adjective; 5 adjectives; 2 adverbs; 1 subordinate clause as an adverb; 3 prepositional phrases as adverbs.

3. Stretching Exercise. Directions: Write the basic sentence first, i.e., the words that will go in the S/V/complement slot of the main clause. Then add the subordinate constructions. You can add adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, and other words as long as your sentence includes the given pattern. You may find that your initial sentence does not allow for modification. If that happens, revise your basic sentence.

1. S [adj. ( )] / V / DO [adv. ( )( )].

2. [adv. [adj.]] S / V / DO [adj.].

Note: Write the main clause first. Then modify the direct object with an adjective clause and the verb with an adverbial clause. Then modify one of the nouns in the adverbial clause with an adjective clause.

Exercise 4: Underline subjects once, finite verbs twice, and bracket and label each subordinate clause.

1. At my junior high school, we were required to take a class called "careers," in which we could investigate different jobs and begin to get an idea of how we would like to earn a living when we grew up.

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HANDOUT # 4: GERUNDS AND GERUNDIVES

Introduction: As you underlined verbs in sentences, you must have noted many "verbs" that you did not underline. The verbs you underlined are known as "finite"; the verbs you did not underline are "verbals." There are only three kinds of verbals--gerunds, gerundives, and infinitives.

Recognizing Verbals: After the finite verbs in the sentence have been underlined, verbals are fairly easily distinguished. Check first to see if the "verb" is a gerund or gerundive. Most gerunds and gerundives end in "-ing" or "-ed," although there are some irregular forms, such as "read," "written," and "lit." But even these irregular forms are the forms used to create the passive voice of the verb: "The book was **written**." "The book was **read**." "The lamp was **lit**." In other words, if adding "was" or "were" before the "verb" would make it a finite verb, you are probably dealing with a gerund or gerundive.

GERUNDS always function as nouns:

Subject: Swimming is good for your health.
Direct Object: He considered teaching as a career.
Predicate Noun: Wasting money is asking for trouble.
Object of Preposition: She paid for college by working as a mechanic.

Note that gerunds are the names of the actions denoted by the verbs.

GERUNDIVES always function as adjectives:

They found the book, **torn** and **coverd** with stains.
Tired by a hard day of work, all he wanted to do was sleep.

Note: If you find a verbal in your papers with "Ref" marked above it, you have probably used a gerundive without having it modify something. In the above examples, "torn" and "covered" modify "book," i.e., the sentence means that the book was torn and the book was covered. Errant gerundives can create some interesting sentences: "Walking around the room, there was a big chandelier."

Verbals are the adult's way of saving words and packing more ideas into one main clause:

1a I saw the boy. He was swimming in the park.
1b I saw the boy swimming in the park.

Exercise 1: Place a box around each of the gerundives in the following sentences. Then, on separate paper, change as many of the gerundives as possible into subordinate clauses.

1. Lacking electric lights, we went to bed early and rose while the dew was still on the grass.
2. I will be a successful business woman working at Dominion Bank in Richmond.

Exercise 2: Bracket the subordinate clauses in the following sentences. Then, on separate paper, change as many of the clauses as possible into gerunds or gerundives.

1. Since I will be working for a civic center or concert hall such as the Capitol Center, as well as managing my brother's band on the side, my salary from both jobs will be about $40,000 a year, with benefits.

Exercise 3: Write a 50-100 word description of the events at one of yesterday's meals. If your description does not include at least five gerundives and four subordinate clauses, revise it so that it does. (You may end up with more than 100 words.)

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HANDOUT # 5: APPOSITIVES

An appositive is a construction in which two words are connected to each other only by their meaning: they both refer to the same thing. There is no preposition or conjunction joining the two words. Some examples are:

Shenandoah is located in Winchester, a **city** in Virginia.
My brother **Albert** came home last week.
She asked him to fold the laundry, a **task** he found extremely boring.

Most textbooks only discuss appositives formed with nouns, but any part of speech can be an appositive:

To be honest, **to tell the truth always and everywhere**, is not easy.

Appositives not only add detail to writing, they can also tighten up syntax, thereby adding to the maturity of your writing. **In revising a paper, 1) see if you can add appositives to add details, and 2) look for the verb "to be" and see if you can use an appositive instead.**

Exercise 1: Circle the appositives in the following:

1. Left alone, and needled by that nagging sense of guilt, she busies herself cleaning house and lets the "coffee-pot boil over," an effective image to describe her anger, which is short-lived, as night softens her memory of the harsh morning light and she falls prey to her lust again.

Exercise 2: Write a fifty word description of a person's physical

appearance. If you did not use three appositives in it, revise it and add them. Underline each appositive.

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A CURRICULUM FOR GRADES 3-12

Introduction

Since my students in Freshman English use the preceding handouts over a period of no more than fourteen weeks, and we spend no more than nine hours of class time with them, they do not have time to assimilate the material (in Piaget's sense of the term). As the following research summary indicates, college students can assimilate the entire system of syntax if an entire semester is devoted to it, but students should study grammar long before they reach college. The following suggestions for a curriculum indicate how the material could be spread out across grades 3-12.

Third Grade: Prepositional Phrases and Compounding

A sample of a third-grade student's writing:

When we were at the library when I was checking out my book, one of my class mats told us that one of the chrysalises was comming open. Everone went over to see the monarch butterllfly come out of the chrysalises that were in the aquarium. When it was all the way out it jumped up on the screen, and when it was out of the chrysalises it turned in to red, brown and orange.

New Term: Preposition

Reading Exercises

Have students place parentheses around the prepositional phrases, including all the compound objects of the preposition, **in their own writing**, and in paragraphs from their reading.

Writing Exercises

1. Give students a list of prepositions and encourage them to use them in all their writing.
2. **Fill in the blanks with two or more words. The first word must be a preposition:** (You can make these exercises by replacing the phrases in what the students read and write with blanks.)
3. **Write a story. In it use the prepositions "at," "over," and "under."**

Here is how my son, age 7, handled this assignment:

> My creature likes soda grapes pears and other fruts.He plays moonball and force field He drinks metal.
>
> **Add: at, with, under, by, in**
>
> My creature likes soda at lunch with pears . We took him outside but he came back in And he also dropped an egg by my socks He also plays under the table.

Anticipate Problems: "to," clauses

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Fourth Grade: Subjects and Verbs

A sample of a fourth-grade student's writing:

It was a quiet drive to Dr. Swanson's office. Karen knew all her dreams where down the tube. Her dream of staring the "Nutcracker" or a gymnas star or a person in the Olympics with hundreds of medals, silver, gold, bronze, and blue ribbons.

New Terms: Subject, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Compounding

Reading Exercises:

Have students place parentheses around prepositional phrases and then underline subjects once, verbs twice, and draw arrows from adjectives and adverbs to the words they modify. (99.9% of prepositional phrases should have arrows going from them.) Use selections from their reading and from their own writing.

Writing Exercises:

1. Give students a short list of good verbs, adjectives, and/or adverbs to be used in a short paper.
2. Fill in the blanks with subjects, verbs, adjectives, and/or adverbs.
3. Recipe Rosters
4. Stretching Exercises

Anticipate Problems: verbals

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Fifth Grade: Complements

New Terms: Predicate Noun, Predicate Adjective, Direct Object, Indirect Object

Exercises: Same as for grades 3 and 4, except that complements are included.

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Sixth Grade: Subordinate Clauses

New Term: Subordinate clause

Exercises: Same as in 3,4, and 5, plus: Have students write a paper, then revise it, making as many clauses as possible into main clauses, then revise it again, making as many clauses as possible subordinate.

N.B.: This is the time to concentrate on sentence punctuation.

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Seventh Grade: Subordinate Clauses--continued.

Variety might be added to seventh grade work by having students focus more on style, i.e., having them count words/main clause in selections from what they read and write, and having them discuss whether subordinate clauses should go before, after, or in the middle of main clauses.

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Eighth Grade: Verbals--Gerunds and Gerundives

New Terms: Verbal, Gerund, Gerundive, Infinitive

Exercises: See "Handout # 4," above.

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Ninth Grade: Verbals--Infinitives

New Term: Infinitive

With the exception of a few interjections, infinitives always function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. Students who have done the previous steps in this process have no trouble with infinitives, since they are the only verbals left in a text.

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Tenth Grade: Other Constructions

Students who have progressed through the previous steps will be able to explain how 98% of the words and constructions in **any** sentence are related to the basic pattern. The following constructions will account for the remaining 2% of syntactic connections.

Nouns Used as Adverbs: The plane crashed two **miles** from here.

Appositives: See "Handout # 5."

Direct Address: Bill, where is Bob?

Retained Complements: the complements after passive verbs: "Murry was considered foolish."

Noun Absolutes: a noun plus gerundive, the gerundive often ellipsed. The construction usually functions as an adverb. Note the difference between:

a.) The plane stood upright; its tail pointed back at the sky.

b.) The plane stood upright, its tail pointed back at the sky.

Teachers have been known to mark (b.) as a comma splice, which it is not. In fact, many stylists consider the noun absolute a mark of elegance.

Delayed Subjects: "It is true that almost everyone loves ice cream." The logical subject, in this case, the subordinate clause, is delayed, and the pronoun "it" takes its place.

Interjections: "It was, **to be more precise**, the best day of his life."

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Eleventh and Twelfth Grades: Stylistics and Linguistics

Having mastered all the syntactical terms that they need to know, students could concentrate on stylistics and/or linguistics. As in preceding grades, teachers could ditto students' paragraphs or entire papers for the class to discuss.

A Summary of
a Research Project on a Method for Improving Students' Writing
by Teaching Grammar

Introduction

Professional journals are full of statements such as "all research has shown that there is no connection between knowledge of grammar and students' ability to write." This study indicates that there is a connection when the method used to teach grammar is geared to improving writing skills.

The current bias against teaching "grammar" is based on statistical research that lacks a solid theoretical base. Connectionist, rather than cognitive, its primary yardstick for measuring maturity is the number and length of main and subordinate clauses. The belief that "more" and "longer" are the best measure of "better" contradicts, among other things, most measures of readability. Clause length should be only one of several measures of syntactic maturity.

No one, moreover, has yet followed Kellogg Hunt's suggestion that syntactic structures may develop in a definite sequence.[1] He suggests, for example, that gerundives are "late blooming" constructions. If Hunt is correct—and both this study and Piaget's theories suggest that he is, then clause length might be appropriate as a primary measure only for specific age levels.

Design of the Experiment

This study of the effect of a method of grammar instruction on students' writing involved three groups of college students. The control group (CL) consisted of students in a Speech course. Although these students wrote between four and six speeches during the semester, they received no instruction in grammar or writing. One experimental group (WR) consisted of students taking a regular Freshman English course. During the semester they received four two-page handouts about grammar and approximately 5 hours of in-class instruction on grammar. They wrote seven papers during the semester. The second experimental group (GR) was a class on "Modern Grammar." Approximately 80% of their class time was devoted to analyzing sentences; 20% to discussions of the relationships of grammar to style, logic, and teaching. These students did no writing for the course.

Students' revisions of the "Aluminum" passage favored by Hunt were used for the pre- and post-tests. Significance levels are based on t-tests of the difference scores between pre- and post-tests. Results are reported only for those students whose pre- and post-test revisions passed a screening based on Piaget's method for measuring amount of content conveyed. (14 students in CL; 23 in WR; 12 in GR.) Numerous items were tested, including such things as average words per appositive, but this summary includes only categories in which at least one of the experimental groups showed a result significant at .05 or better. None of the results of the control group were statistically significant.

To test the validity of the "Aluminum" passage, a correlation study was made between the students' free writing and the pre-test "Aluminum" revision. The correlation in words/main clause is significant at .01; in % of subordinate clauses embedded at level 1, at .05; at level 2, at .05; in verbals/main clause at .05; and in % of words in prepositional phrases, at

.05. These correlations are especially interesting since the writing compared was in two different modes--a technical process, and a narrative story.

Summary of Hypotheses to be Tested and Results

The primary hypotheses to be tested were:

1. The experimental groups would show a significant decrease in the number of words required to rewrite the passage.

Results: Total Words Used

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	114.21	114.93	0.71	0.6%	13	0.14	NS
WR	111.70	108.78	-2.91	-2.6%	22	-1.37	NS
GR	108.67	93.25	-15.42	-14.2%	11	-3.90	.01

Comment: Concision may be the writer's chief virture: the students who studied grammar and did no writing showed a marked ability to present the same content in fewer words.

2. The experimental groups would show a decrease in the total number of finite verbs used to revise the passage. The decrease would indicate that the content is being expressed in more mature constructions such as verbals.

Results: Total Finite Verbs Used

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	16.57	16.50	-0.07	-0.4%	13	-0.07	NS
WR	16.78	15.43	-1.35	-8.0%	22	-2.43	.05
GR	14.83	12.50	-2.33	-15.7%	11	-2.10	NS

Comment: Students in the writing class achieved a statistically significant decrease. Note also that the GR group, with a 15.7% decrease, came very close to being significant at .05. (The critical value is -2.20.)

3. The experimental groups would use fewer main clauses to revise the passage. This is a corrolary of 2 and also indicates that the students are not simply using compound finite verbs. Fewer main clauses indicate that students are organizing the total material into fewer "bundles," just as a chess master doesn't see thirty-two pieces on the board, but rather two or three patterns.

Results: Total Main Clauses Used

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	9.64	9.14	-0.50	- 5.2%	13	-0.82	NS
WR	10.09	8.96	-1.13	-11.2%	22	-2.10	.05
GR	8.50	6.00	-2.50	-29.4%	11	-4.72	.01

Comment: Both experimental groups achieved significant decreases. Note that

the grammar group used fewer main clauses in the pre-test than either of the two other groups did in the post-test, yet it still managed a larger average decrease.

4. The experimental groups would show increases in the traditional measures of syntactic maturity: words per main clause and subordinate clauses per main clause.

Results: Words per Main Clause

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	12.39	13.09	0.70	5.7%	13	1.20	NS
WR	11.67	13.03	1.36	11.7%	22	2.13	.05
GR	13.56	16.16	2.59	19.1%	11	3.64	.01

Results: Subordinate Clauses per Main Clause

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	.53	.59	0.06	10.7%	13	1.09	NS
WR	.54	.60	0.06	11.7%	22	0.90	NS
GR	.59	.86	0.27	46.1%	11	2.30	.05

Comment: Although these increases are not as dramatic as those reported by Mellon and by O'Hare, the subjects in this study were college students, many of them upper-classmen. Mellon and O'Hare worked with seventh grade students whose comparable words-per-main-clause scores were: Mellon's Pre-test: Experimental=9.98, Control=9.94; Mellon's Post-test: Experimental 11.25, Control 10.20.[2] O'Hare's Pre-Test: Experimental 9.63, Control 9.69; O'Hare's Post-test: Experimental 15.75, Control 9.96.[3] The students in this experiment, therefore, were not only doing a different kind of writing (revising the description of a process, as opposed to free writing of a story), they were also significantly more advanced before the experiment began. Among other things, this experiment should be repeated with seventh grade students.

5. Numerous other constructions were checked for significant change, but the relative infrequency of many of them (noun absolutes) makes significant statistical analysis difficult. Significant results were found in the following:

Results: Verbals Per Main Clause

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	.60	.60	.00	0.6%	13	0.03	NS
WR	.46	.62	.16	33.7%	22	2.40	.05
GR	.80	.94	.15	18.4%	11	1.37	NS

Comment: Verbals include gerunds, gerundives, and infinitives. In addition to suggesting the results of instruction, these scores also confirm Hunt's hypothesis that some constructions develop later than others.

Results: Gerundives per Main Clause

	Pre	Post	Avg Dif	% Change	DF	t-value	Sgn at
CL	.39	.40	.02	3.9%	13	0.17	NS
WR	.31	.39	.07	23.1%	22	1.28	NS
GR	.52	.64	.12	23.3%	11	2.37	.05

Comment: Considered individually, gerundives were the only verbal to show statistically significant increases, but this is, I believe, the first study to show such increases.

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Final Comment: Although the study suggests both the effectiveness of the method and the accuracy of Hunt's hypotheses, several correlary studies have yet to be completed:

1. A study will be made of the tricky problem of "errors."
2. Various analyses by age, sex, SAT scores, etc. have yet to be done.

This summary has presented the results of the experiment and implied the theory of syntactic development behind it. A more complete explanation of the method of instruction and of the theory of syntactic development is being prepared.

I am also planning a study of the constructions used by students in grades 3-12.

Notes:

1. See: Kellogg W. Hunt, "Early Blooming and Late Blooming Syntactic Structures." Evaluating Writing. ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. NCTE, 1977. and Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels. Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1965.

2. John C. Mellon. Transformational Sentence-Combining. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1969, 52.

3. Frank O'Hare. Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971, 54.